

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 006539

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE (MENNUTI); DRL/IRF (FARR)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2011

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#) [VT](#) [TA](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH VATICAN CHINA EXPERT

CLASSIFIED BY: CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR R.J. NICHOLSON FOR REASONS 1.5  
(A) AND (D).

[11.](#) (C) AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON CALLED ON ARCHBISHOP MARIA CELLI,  
SECRETARY OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR THE PATRIMONY OF THE

SIPDIS

APOSTOLIC SEE, ON DECEMBER 14. ALTHOUGH CELLI, IN HIS  
CURRENT POSITION AS CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR OF VATICAN PROPERTIES  
DOES NOT HAVE A DIRECT FOREIGN POLICY ROLE, HE IS OFTEN  
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 VATICANA 06539 191519Z  
CALLED UPON BY THE FOREIGN MINISTRY TO ADVISE AND ASSIST ON  
CHINA POLICY.

[12.](#) (C) CELLI SAID THAT THE VATICAN ACCEPTS THAT THERE WILL BE  
NO IMPROVEMENT IN CHINA/VATICAN RELATIONS UNTIL AT LEAST THE  
COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS IN MARCH, 2002. THE CURRENT  
DIRECTOR OF THE RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS BUREAU IN BEIJING IS AN  
"OLD MAOIST". ACCORDING TO CELLI, THE POWER OF THE RELIGIOUS  
AFFAIRS BUREAU IS A MAJOR REASON THAT BEIJING REFUSES TO  
BEGIN DISCUSSIONS ON NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS. CELLI  
EXPLAINED THAT THE BUREAU IS A MAJOR BUREAUCRACY WHICH IS  
FIGHTING HARD TO PROTECT ITS POWER, PERKS, AND PERSONNEL. THE  
HEAD OF THE PATRIOTIC CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE BISHOP OF BEIJING,  
IS COMPLACENT WITH THE CURRENT SITUATION AND HE TOO DEPENDS  
ON THE BUREAU FOR HIS POWER AND POSITION.

[13.](#) (C) AMBASSADOR ASKED IF THE POPE'S RECENT OVERTURE TO  
BEIJING HAS HAD ANY EFFECT. CELLI REPLIED THAT THE VATICAN  
IS NOW ACCEPTING THE FACT THAT IT HAS NOT. HE WENT ON TO SAY  
THAT CHINA IS A "BIRD CAGE" AND THAT THE VATICAN'S GOAL IS  
NOT TO BREAK DOWN THE "CAGE" BUT TO WIDEN IT. THE VATICAN  
DOES NOT EXPECT FULL FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN CHINA ANY TIME IN  
THE NEAR FUTURE, AND IS THEREFORE WILLING TO ACCEPT A  
"DECENT" LEVEL. THE AMBASSADOR INQUIRED IF VATICAN RELATIONS  
WITH TAIWAN IS AN OBSTACLE TO NORMALIZATION. CELLI SAID THAT  
BEIJING KNOWS "PERFECTLY WELL" THAT TAIWAN IS NOT AN ISSUE.  
ACCORDING TO CELLI, BEIJING USES THE TAIWAN ISSUE AS AN EXCUSE  
TO PREVENT DISCUSSION ON THE REAL ISSUE-- THE RIGHT OF THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH TO NAME ITS OWN BISHOPS.

[14.](#) (C) CELLI SAID THAT THE VATICAN KNOWS PRESIDENT BUSH MADE  
CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 VATICANA 06539 191519Z  
AN INTERVENTION ON ITS BEHALF IN SHANGHAI, AND THAT IT IS  
VERY MUCH APPRECIATED. THIS TYPE OF HELP IS NEEDED AS THE  
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN CHINA IS SUFFERING. CELLI POINTED TO  
THE FACT THAT WITHIN FIVE OR SIX YEARS, THE MAJORITY OF THE  
ELDERLY BISHOPS WILL PROBABLY DIE. AS THERE WAS A LONG  
PERIOD IN WHICH THERE WERE NO ORDINATIONS OF PRIESTS AND  
BISHOPS, THESE DYING BISHOPS WILL BE REPLACED BY VERY YOUNG,  
INEXPERIENCED CHURCHMEN. THUS, THE VATICAN'S GOAL IS TO  
NORMALIZE ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH BEIJING BEFORE THIS OCCURS.  
THIS WOULD ALLOW THE VATICAN TO GUIDE THE TRANSITION.

[15.](#) (C) AMBASSADOR ASKED CELLI FOR HIS VIEWS ON VIETNAM.  
CELLI SAID THAT HE IS NO LONGER INVOLVED ON THE VIETNAM  
ISSUE. THAT SAID, HE BELIEVED THAT THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY  
WAS SOMEWHAT IMPROVED THAN WHEN HE WAS LAST THERE FIVE YEARS  
AGO. AT THAT TIME, HE WAS NOT ALLOWED TO VISIT ANY CATHOLIC  
CHURCHES IN HANOI.

[16.](#) (C) COMMENT: THE VATICAN IS RESIGNED TO THE FACT THAT THE  
POPE'S OVERTURE IN OCTOBER FELL ON DEAF EARS. IT IS NOW  
WAITING UNTIL AFTER MARCH TO RESUME ITS DIPLOMATIC PUSH. IT  
IS LIKELY FOR THE VATICAN TO MAKE SOME CONCESSIONS TO BEIJING  
TO REESTABLISH ITSELF BEFORE THE END OF THIS DECADE.

NICHOLSON/////////  
SEMBLER

CONFIDENTIAL

>

2001VATICANA06539 - Classification: CONFIDENTIAL